



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## PERSONAL IDEALISM AND ITS ETHICAL BEARINGS.

IN a volume entitled "The Limits of Evolution, and Other Essays," published something over two years ago, I set forth a new system of Idealism, and illustrated it from several points of view, which together cover the three chief fields of human concern—Science, Art, and Religion. I have called this system "Personal Idealism" because, as I undertake to show, it is alone consistent with the existence of a world of genuine persons, including a personal God. I have been asked to give here a brief summary of the system, and to point out whatever importance it may have for the aims of the higher ethical life.

The system is closely affiliated with another, with which readers of the JOURNAL are probably familiar, advocated by the late Thomas Davidson, and called by him Apeirotheism; that is, the doctrine of a divine nature, or ideal rationality, distributed in an indefinite number of individual minds. I mention this affiliation, because, although it is unmistakable, it came about from studies entirely independent, and without collusion or even conference. The agreement, so far as it exists (and it by no means exists throughout), must be explained as an encouraging coincidence, resting on a common connection with the same foundations in the history of previous thought: two investigators, working quite apart upon a common problem, without any knowledge by either of what the other was doing, have come out upon a result in the main the same. And it is of great interest to note that a third thinker, remote from both of us, Mr. McTaggart, of the University of Cambridge, has reached a kindred view, closer to Mr. Davidson's, in fact, than my own.

This common result is the doctrine that the world of absolute reality is a world of minds, each eternal in the sense of being immutably real, self-active, and self-determining; none of them is a derivative, or mere result, of the efficient causality of any other being whatsoever, though all co-exist in a mutual

recognition intrinsic to the essential nature of each. Thus, by their eternal (*i. e.*, essential) freedom, they constitute a moral order, in the profoundest and only proper meaning of that phrase.

But beyond this base-line of agreement, the system as it has developed in my own mind diverges in important ways from that reached by Mr. Davidson. In the first place, I have to dissent from the view recorded in his title of Apeirotheism: I am unable to regard as divine any of the individual minds that he took account of; they are, to me, all of a type which I should describe as human, in contrast to divine. In the second place, I find it necessary, in order to complete the logical circuit of the whole world of minds, to recognize in it a member to whom the name of God, as designating the absolutely realized perfection of Personality, is alone adequate. This supremely personal Being, this one and only God, my honored friend did not recognize, because, like so many of the members of the Ethical Societies who sympathized with his view or were directly influenced by his reasonings, he found neither necessity nor warrant for it: he could see no propriety in calling by the name of God any one of the eternal society of minds rather than another.

I must not burden the pages of this journal with any argument upon the point of difference between myself and my lamented friend. I merely wish to set it forth, and to call attention to it as vital to the view I name Personal Idealism. Readers who care to follow up the argument, I must refer to my full discussion of the matter, in the fifth and seventh essays of my volume.\*

In accordance with this fact ( as I aim to show it) that the eternal world is a world of minds falling under the two heads of (1) God, and (2) non-divine consciousnesses who yet in their eternal aspect constitute with God and with each other an indivisibly harmonious whole, I give to this World of Spirits the name of the City of God, following, though with a heightened

---

\*The Limits of Evolution and Other Essays, illustrating the Metaphysical Theory of Personal Idealism. New York: The Macmillan Company; London: Macmillan & Co., 1901.

meaning drawn from the fact of universal moral autonomy, the usage that has prevailed regarding this name from the time of the Stoics, and that has been consecrated in Christendom from the days of St. Augustine. The characteristic difference between God and all the other minds, I find to lie in the possession by the latter, and by them only, of a sensuous consciousness, rising everlastingly, through a serial being in time and in space, toward a complete harmony with the eternal ideal that is the changeless central essence of each mind, and whose proper and only real object is God. In short, the new system refers the entire being and linkage of Nature to the minds other than God, so far as concerns its *efficient* causation. God is not the creator, in the sense of the literal producer, or First Cause, of any mind as such, nor even of that aspect in the conscious life of other minds which we know as their merely natural being, whether of psychic states or of physical processes. It is here that the system parts company with such an idealism as Berkeley's, and takes part with that of Kant, or, still more closely in some regards, with the earlier theory of Aristotle.

As Final Cause, however, or attracting Ideal, God has, according to this view, absolute and immutable living relations to the being of all other minds (as these also, reciprocally, have to God's own being), and likewise to the being even of Nature; so that Nature takes its supreme law, the law of Evolution, from God's existence as the eternally-realized Ideal of every mind. Hence, as Final Cause, God is at once (1) the Logical Ground apart from which, as Defining Standard, no consciousness can define itself as *I*, nor, consequently, can exist at all; and (2) the Ideal Goal toward which each consciousness in its eternal freedom moves its merely natural and shifting being, in its effort after complete accord between the two phases of its nature, the eternal and the temporal, the rational and the sensuous.

Thus the system teaches that the two supreme Divine Offices celebrated in historic theology, Creation and Regeneration, have alike a most real meaning, though indeed not a literal but only

a metaphorical one. It invites theology to realize the pressing need of now revising and correcting the conception of Creation, in a similar metaphorical sense to that in which the conception of Regeneration has now for some time been reformed: as the latter is now by leading theologians interpreted as the influence of a consciously apprehended ideal truth, the purely final causation by which the Holy Spirit gains its ends, so let the former be for the future read in the corresponding sense of a final causation alone. Between mind and mind, between God and all other minds, there is no causation but Final Cause; the sole realm of Efficient Cause is the realm of Nature, whether physical and psychic, objective or subjective; efficient causation operates from the non-divine minds to their natural (or phenomenal) and sensuous contents, or else, in a secondary manner, between the serial terms of these. Hence God is in nowise responsible for the evil, either natural or moral, that we find in the world of experience, but only for the good that gradually arises in it; and even for this good, only in chief, and not solely; for to every mind that promotes the good and helps to check the evil, belongs indefeasibly the credit of his part in the increase of good and the decrease of evil. The evil in the world is the product of the non-divine minds themselves: the natural evil, of their very nature; the moral, the only *real* evil, of their failure to answer to their reason with their will.

This brief sketch of the view must suffice as preparation for the main task which I have been asked to undertake, namely, to exhibit, with some convincing detail, any advantages the system affords to the aims of moral life. To do this I must proceed from the foregoing outline in two directions: (1) I must clearly show the moral need for the system, by exposing the moral inadequacy of all the other current philosophical schemes, even of the many current Idealisms, thus bringing out more exactly, by the way, the precise and pertinent points in which the system is new; and (2) I must then collect the several items in which the system displays its worth for those who care supremely for moral endeavor.

## I.

That the historic systems of philosophy, not only those which have been directly influenced by the historic systems of religion and theology, but also those which have originated more or less in opposition to these, or in correction of them, are unequal to meeting the conditions essential to the existence of a moral order and to the possibility of a moral life in individuals, will appear plainly upon a brief analysis of their leading conceptions.

They are every one of them (with the single exception named below) colored through and through with Creationism, at least tacit, and generally conscious and deliberate,—a term by which, taken literally, I conveniently designate the reference of all realities to a single First Cause, conceived as explaining existence by being their efficient, or originating, or producing Source. In other words, from the fourfold system of causes set forth by Aristotle—Material, Formal, Efficient, and Final—they all select Efficient Cause as the category which is to be primordial in their scheme of explanation; then they have this Efficient Cause produce the Material, and mould and change it by the Formal, in answer to the Final as its purpose. In proceeding so, they no doubt follow a universal historic impulse of the human mind, unpurified by sufficient self-criticism; for this impulse displays itself in all the various systems of religion and their accordant theologies.

This theme of literal creation is so inwrought into the structure of historic thinking, that it will require a long struggle on the part of criticism to get rid of it. Through the influence of the Church and the philosophical schools, it may be said to have become in fact institutional, so that combatting it is like fighting organized civilization itself. Yet one can make the truth clear, that only by the dislodgment of it is the success of the deeper principle possible which is the real soul of civilization,—I mean the principle of moral life, the life of duty freely followed.

If we examine the great historic systems, we see that with reference to this Creationism they may be thrown into the following four main groups:

*First*, those that are either (1) the direct theological expressions of the post-exilic Hebraism which, taking occasion from the Eternal Dualism of the Parsees, and correcting it by a modified recognition of the Supreme Being of the older Orientalisms, taught a dualism of a monarchotheistic sort—of a Creator, and a creation summoned into existence at a certain date by his sheer fiat (e. g., the systems of Augustine, Aquinas, and Scotus), or else are (2) philosophical enterprises, undertaken in all rational good faith, but silently engendered by the influence of this Hebraic doctrine even when they greatly modify it (e. g., the systems of Descartes, Leibnitz, Locke, Berkeley, the Deists, and, with all his protests, at the last pinch even Kant).

*Second*, those that for this dualistic and miraculous exercise of efficient causation, for creation *ex nihilo*, substitute the older but more rationally continuous view of the immanence of the creation in a monistic Creator or Eternal Source, and thus carry us back into the current of pantheistic Emanationism dating from primeval times. E. g., the systems of Erigena, Nicolas Cusanus, Malebranche, Spinoza, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel; with such later offshoots as in Spencer, Fiske, T. H. Green, the two Cairds, Bradley, and Royce,—all tracing back, in the last resort, to the great oriental philosophies, of which the Vedanta is the type. In this group belong, too, unless I quite misunderstand them, the systems of Dr. W. T. Harris, Professor Kedney, and Professor Macbride Sterrett.

*Third*, those that abandon every sort of consciousness as a First Principle, drop Final Cause from the list of causes, and so make Matter the producing source of every one of its forms, through the force supposed to be inherent in it or commanent with it. These are the manifold Materialisms, atomic or other, from Democritus to Büchner, Vogt, or Dühring.

*Fourth*, those that repudiate the search into causes as baseless and futile, demand that philosophy, to be sound, shall drop metaphysics as well as theology, and confine itself rigidly to observational and experimental science, merely describing with precision the facts of history and experience. This is Positivism, and bears but one noted name, that of Comte, though all

the strictly sceptical systems have contributed to it, from the Later Academy down to Hume. In its own way, it frees itself from Creationism utterly. But this way is the way of confessed and open Atheism.

Considering these four groups with reference to their bearing on the possibility of moral action, we at once throw out the third and the fourth, as systems of confessed necessarianism, which do not even pretend to furnish any basis for individual freedom or for the pursuit of a rational aim (such as fullness of life in the whole spirit) from conviction and choice. On the ground either of Positivism or of Materialism, Ethics can never, properly speaking, be Morals. If it escapes fatalism of the hardest sort, with all the consequent hopelessness for most it cannot avoid hedonism, nor, in the logical end, an egoistic and utterly transient and trivial hedonism.

We have to confine ourselves, then, in any hope of finding conditions adequate for morality—conditions adequate, that is for the life of serious duty—to the first and second of our groups. But from the second,—the systems of efficient causation construed in terms of Monism and Immanence,—the self-determining individual is necessarily cancelled. All the particular beings involved in the being of the monistic Whole are but modes or expressions of the sole self-activity of the Whole; they have no activity really their own, but only a derivative *operation*, determined by the One. This is either openly confessed by the supporters of these systems, or, if they attempt to evade it, they are compelled to end in more or less concealed confessions of it, despite all their efforts. If anybody doubts this, let him attentively read Hegel on this question, or T. H. Green, the brothers Caird, and Professor Royce.\*

The first group of systems, the dualistic or literal Creationisms, have, to first impression, a certain appearance of providing for the possibility of freedom, and therefore of a genuine morality. For it seems nominally possible that a Creator by fiat

---

\*Let the interested reader consult, particularly, Professor Royce's "Supplementary Essay" in the volume entitled "The Conception of God" (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1897), in the chapter where he undertakes to deal with the question of the freedom of the individual.



might say: "Be thou!—a being with power to perceive and to judge, and with will to choose, unpredestined. I create thee rational, and leave thee untrammelled." But not to mention the complete contradiction of this which the usual theologies and other schemes of predestination introduce, from the need of organizing the world-scheme consistently with their monarchotheistic First Principle, it soon appears that Creationism itself, even in this dualistic form (which does to some degree extricate, or appear to extricate, the creature from the embrace of the Creator), must logically exclude the possibility of freedom. For the Creator cannot, of course, create except by exactly and precisely conceiving; otherwise his product would not differ from nonentity. The created nature must therefore inevitably register the will and the plan of the Creator; and there is really no more escaping this under the dualistic scheme than under the monistic, where the consequence has been fearlessly drawn for us all, for all time, in the classic illustration of Spinoza concerning the moving stone, flung from the sling and coming to consciousness after the impulse. Aware only of its unimpeded movement, and not at all of the impelling start, this would of course imagine itself self-moving and free. But those who see whence that unhindered movement really comes, know better. They know how utterly predetermined are both its direction and its rate, by the One who gave it to be.

So much for the problem of Freedom. There is another, also essential to the working fulfilment of a moral life,—I mean the problem of Evil. Our third and fourth groups indeed have alike no conscious World-Author to blame for evil, but they alike reduce all evil to natural evil, since their necessarian systems provide no room for blameable wrong in men. Thus they furnish no field for the compensation of even natural evil, to say nothing of moral, by voluntary good, and therefore they force the unreserved acceptance of things as they are.

Nor is this result escaped by a resort to the second group of our systems. Neither Spencerian Agnosticism nor the higher forms of evolutionary philosophy known as Cosmic Theism or Idealistic Monism can avoid making the One Ground of Things, whether conceived of as conscious or as unknowable,

responsible for all that is in life, the evil as well as the good. And the utterly intimate intermingling of the First Cause with all of its effects soever, which these monistic systems all imply, and in some cases even maintain, renders this responsibility so direct and complete as to shock all our ideal sensibilities and make reverence for such a Being, vast and mighty as it may be, quite impossible,—not to speak of adoring devotion. How can we revere that which consciously produces or permits uncontrolled evil, even on the pretense that it is done for eventual good? How worship that which sins in and with us, even if this sinning be for ultimate universal penitence and amendment? Or how can we commit our guidance, devoutly, to that of which we cannot say whether it is conscious or unconscious, and into whose counsels, or whose drift, if perchance it have any, we cannot possibly penetrate? It is condemnation, not recommendation of these systems, to any moral mind, when their advocates declare, as sometimes they do, that “the God of things as they are is the God of things as they ought to be.” A mind heartily moral knows better when the poet, however plausibly, declares that “whatever *is* is right.” As moral beings, we *know* that much which is *is wrong*, and is in no way palliable, or even to be tolerated, by a good being; yes, that our whole business with it is simply to get rid of it, and to bring on a state of the world in which it shall no longer have room to exist.

This same responsibility for evil, even for sin, is also carried back upon God by the systems in our first group. The predestinating Sovereign, the universal Maker, cannot escape the contagion of the evil and the wickedness that pervades the world which he creates and from moment to moment sustains. Even the natural evil in the world, however regarded as a means of greater good, is so extensively administered (if it *is* administered) with a reckless hand, absolutely regardless of the suffering of conscious beings, as to revolt minds even as little developed in goodness as ours. How dare we say that such things are wrought even by the *consent* of divine Justice and Love? Still less, surely, dare we say that they are wrought by a God’s predestinating *edict*.

## II.

Under such lights as these, which are shed from what the vast majority of thinking men agree is the profoundest and best that is in us, all such systems as we have described display their final moral incompetency. Let us turn now to the new view, the view that abandons both Monism and Monarchotheism, that abandons Creationism in both its forms, takes resort to Final Cause as the primary and only explanatory principle, and holds to an Eternal Pluralism of casual minds, each self-active, though all recognizant of all others, and thus all in their central essence possessed of moral autonomy, the very soul of all really moral being. How will this view adjust itself to the primary conditions of moral life? In answering this, I must avoid all practical detail, and confine myself to the universal conditions of moral activity.

(1). *The first of these conditions is the reality of moral freedom.* Upon this the new system is clear, absolutely clear, and alone is so. It alone founds the real and the phenomenal world in the unqualified reality of a world of individual minds, each of them individual in the only sufficing sense—the sense of self-active intelligence as well as of complete particular identity. It establishes this as a fact in the only way in which such establishment is possible; that is, by proving for each mind a system of *a priori* cognition, here following and at the same time clarifying the argumentation of Kant, and taking care to note, and to refute, the counter-argumentation founded on the theory of natural evolution. It provides, too, for freedom in both senses: that of spontaneous decision and action, eternally and unchangeably adhering to the cause of Right alone; and that of choice in alternatives, as these continually present themselves in time,—the ever-recurring alternative between the one eternal choice of Right and the manifold and ever-varying forms of temporal defect and wrong.

Not a single one of these causally real individuals is determined to his acts by any extraneous efficient causation, not even God's, but each is led wholly by ideal influences, by final causation purely, as these ideal influences are apprehended and interpreted. The responsibility of each goes back, in the last

resort, to his responsibility for right knowledge and right judgment, the sources of which he possesses in his essence, as knowing *a priori*.

The complete reality of freedom is found, however, in the possibility of realizing a moral order in the world of experience. By this I do not mean the mere maybe-so of such an order, but the real power of bringing it about; and the new system provides for this, and alone provides for it, first, by the objective aspect of its theory of Freedom, and, secondly, by its supplying a thorough proof for the doctrine of Immortality. But these two matters carry us into further conditions of the moral life, and require separate treatment.

(2). *The objective, the socially objective, nature of the self-active consciousness.* Without this, the moral ideal would be nothing but an empty egoism, incapable of transcending solipsism, and leading only to a self-centred culture. Justice and benevolence would have no place in such a life, but only æsthetic self-refinement and self-poise—what the Greeks called *σωφροσύνη* and we try quite in vain to translate by temperance, moderation, self-control, sobriety, and what not. But the new theory puts altruism into the very being of each spontaneous self, and lodges his necessary recognition of others in the very primal intelligent act whereby he defines himself and gives intelligible meaning to his saying *I*. The spontaneous logical form of this first certainty for each, is thus primordially social. By this the system reveals the fact that Kant's "categorical imperative," in its final and fully significant form, *So act as to regard humanity, whether thine own or that of another, as an End withal, and never merely as a means*, is in reality the very first principle of knowledge. Hence the moral principle gets the desired warrant from intelligence which past systems have all failed to give it. The interrupting Kantian gap between morality and intelligence is closed; morality itself becomes *intellectual*—at once itself objective, inclusive of others equally real with the self, and conferring objectivity, that is, universally intelligible value, upon the individual intelligence. The sources of *objective* moral judgment in the world of time and circumstance are also thus laid open to the

experience of each mind, in the power to consult the public judgment and to verify or correct the private judgment by it.

(3). *Fulfilled freedom, however, as the experimental realization of a moral life, founded in autonomous judgment, depends upon the Immortality of the Individual, in the sense of the everlastingness of his process of experience.* On no other terms, as Kant has well shown, can the moral person fulfil his task. To win the realization of his divine ideal, the reduction of his transitional life under the dominance of his eternal choice of the image of God—the image of perfect Holiness, Justice, and Love. Now the New Idealism, the organic Rational Pluralism, furnishes the only clear proofs of individual immortality, in the sense of an everlasting personal continuance in a world of perceptions organized by the presence of eternal ideals, supplying power for their eventual victory. But lack of space forbids me from here rehearsing these proofs. I must refer the interested reader to the form of them presented in the sixth essay of my book.

(4). *The hope of the real improvement of this present world, an improvement in the long run steadfast, by our moral endeavor.* With lack of this, there would be moral discouragement, and the chief use of this life would be merely to find the means of departing out of it. Righteousness would only be “in Heaven.” This added essential to moral effort, Personal Idealism supplies, with assurance of hope, in its indivisible union of the eternal and the temporal worlds; a union in which the eternal is the unitary whole, and the temporal the potentially governed part. More than this, indeed much more, and of higher interest, might be said; but more I must here for lack of room forbear to say, and must again refer readers to the fuller exposition in the first and seventh essays of my book.

(5). *The validity of the belief in the solvability of the Enigma of Evil.* We can have no hope in moral endeavor in a world whose Source and Controller we cannot clear of the suspicion of intending or causing evil, or of being in collusion with it, or even of conniving at it. We have seen, above, how all the systems that work from a single Efficient Cause hopelessly fail to attain this clearance of the Cause. I have already hinted

at the contrasted success of the new Pluralism. Its God has no part whatever in the causation of evil, but the whole of evil, both natural and moral, falls into the causation, either natural or moral, that belongs to the minds other than God. They alone carry in their being the world of sense, wherein alone evil occurs or wrong-doing can be made real. This evil pertaining to the non-divine is moreover capable of cure, through the immanence of each being's eternal principle of good and the presence to it of the divine Friend and Saviour. So we pass to the concluding condition.

(6). *The validity of the belief in God.* That is, the belief in a real absolutely perfect Person, transcendent of every other, immanent in none, except by the presence eternally of his Image, or Ideal, before each mind; a real Being, not an Ideal simply; complete in Holiness, Justice, and Love, changelessly attentive to every other mind, rationally sympathetic with all its experiences, and bent on its spiritual success; its inexorable Judge, but also its eternal Inspirer, by his omnipresent reality and his ever-present Image in the conscience.

The absence of objective reality from such an ideal Being, its reduction to a subjective ideal simply, as some modern philosophers caught in an agnostic snare have proposed, would strip moral life of the main support for its struggle against wrong. Amid the manifold disappointments and discouragements of the long battle with defect and wrong, the merely subjective ideal would tend to fade out, to decline both in vividness and in character, and so cease to attract and adequately guide effort. The only adequate support (and it *is* adequate) is the *reality* of God, the heavenly Judge, the unfailing Beholder and Sympathizer. To him, the one Absolute Conscience, in every moral disaster *our* conscience turns for assured refuge and certain renewal of moral courage and strength. That is the real act and infallible function of Prayer.

I think it may justly be said that the new Harmonic Pluralism furnishes the only valid proofs for the reality of such a Being. What these proofs are, I must again spare space by avoiding here to recite. For one form they take, let me again refer to my volume, in its concluding essay, and also, in a some-

what simpler expression, in its fifth. I would point out the fact, however, that all other systems professedly theistic draw their proofs for the being of their God either from naturalistic considerations that must fall short of all attributes properly divine, while they also unavoidably stain the image of the Most High with direct or indirect responsibility for all evil; or they rest their case on that fallacious form of the Ontologic Proof which unavoidably fails to carry us beyond subjective ideality; or else, as in the moral method of Kant, they lose all hold on *known* reality, and leave God's being, for its sole support, to our fealty toward our moral calling.

G. H. HOWISON.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA.

---

### THE LIMITATIONS OF ETHICAL INQUIRY.

SUCCESS in any of the sciences is so obviously dependent upon a clear understanding of their special boundaries and method that no apology is necessary for an attempt to define more accurately the logical pre-suppositions of ethical inquiry. No advance is possible without a knowledge of what are, and are not, its legitimate problems and method. More especially the many recent demands for a scientific or, specifically, for a psychological treatment of morality raises these underlying questions of epistemology and make it imperative upon us to understand clearly the purpose of our study.

There are two pre-suppositions which must be made by every special science of a character so simple that it would seem an impertinence to mention them were it not that they have been apparently ignored by many reputable writers on ethics.

1. No science has to prove the existence of its own subject matter, but assumes it as part of the common experience of the race. Zoology is not expected to demonstrate the existence of living creatures, nor do we demand of mineralogy that it prove the reality of minerals. Such sciences take for granted the existence of certain phenomena and set them-